

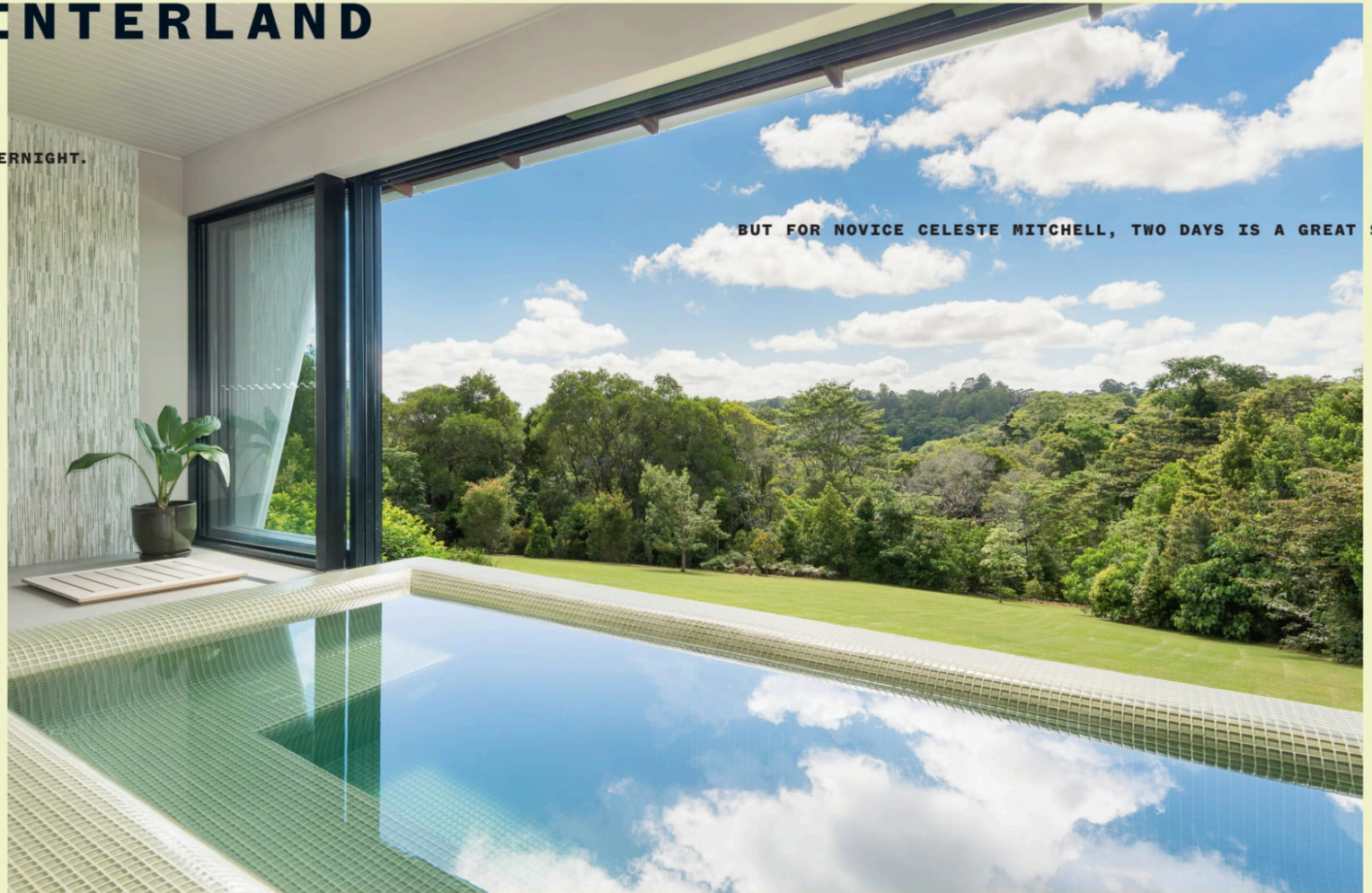
QLD

# SUNSHINE COAST HINTERLAND

EVEN DEVOUT WELLNESS WARRIORS  
DON'T ACHIEVE BALANCE OVERNIGHT.

BUT FOR NOVICE CELESTE MITCHELL, TWO DAYS IS A GREAT START.

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The infinity pool at Spicers Tamarind Retreat's spa





The hot tub on the deck of a Luxury Falls Villa and shiitake rice bowl with seasonal greens, egg yolk and milk crumb at Spicers Tamarind Retreat



I'm probably supposed to be hitting some higher level of consciousness right now but all I can focus on is how much caramel is stuck in my teeth. As I practise mindfulness by devouring a matchbox-sized chocolate like it's the last whiff of pleasure I'll experience on this earth, a sound sends me unglued. The stifled giggles of my old friend, Shireen, erupt in a rip-roaring snort. I know immediately she's hoovered hers.

I'm in a circle with eight other women – including Shireen, who I convinced to come with me – and a token male on day one of Spicers Tamarind's inaugural wellness retreat. A clutch of luxury villas in tranquil rainforest on Obi Obi Creek at Maleny in the Sunshine Coast hinterland, Tamarind ([spicersretreats.com](http://spicersretreats.com)) is renowned for its hatted restaurant, cooking school and day spa. No caffeine withdrawals here. That fact is admittedly what sold me on the place and I'm pleased to find the two-day program prioritises decadence over deprivation.

Short retreats like this one, condensed into a few days rather than weeks-long programs, are on the rise as Australia's collective mental health strains against the pandemic. "I'm just exhausted," admits the GP I sit beside at lunch when we first arrive. "I haven't been travelling or spending money, just working, so I saw this and said, 'Yes'." The formula is being embraced by a number of wellness properties in Australia – Spicers Tamarind locked in a two-night stay in November to cater for demand, with another scheduled for March 2022. Crystalbrook Byron has similar plans and Daintree Ec lodge sold out a short program in two weeks, swiftly scheduling three more next year (see opposite).

"The theme of these next two days is to slow down," says leader Rachel O'Brien as we pad across polished floorboards and sit by the fire in the longhouse-style conference room at Tamarind. The former executive has spent the past decade on her own wellbeing journey after discovering a lump in her neck on a flight to London. A diagnosis of non-Hodgkin lymphoma led to a total life overhaul – long hours, stress and too much wine were swapped for yoga, meditation and Wim Hof-inspired cold showers. She's emerged as a leadership expert who can "walk the line between corporate and as woo-woo as you can get". To my relief, rather than espousing strict rules or lessons, she paints our time ahead as an open invitation "to share and find what works for you".

"Everything is available here – coffee, wine," she says. "It's not a school camp. If you want to sleep in, whatever your body needs, that's what I'm going to encourage you to do."

Apart from one, my fellow guests and I are all retreat virgins. These are people more likely to book a dégustation at Spicers Hidden Vale or Spicers Peak Lodge than sign up for a juice cleanse. It can take anywhere between 18 and 254 days to break a bad habit so I'm not expecting huge behavioural shifts in 48 hours. For most of us here, time alone in our regular lives is practically non-existent so this is a rare chance to catch a breath. The closest I've come to anything like this lately is sitting on the carpet while my toddler "does" my hair.

Instead of revisiting prosaic concepts like work/life balance, O'Brien focuses on what she calls the "four pillars of thriving" – movement, breath, mindfulness and conscious consumption.

Hamilton Lundt, Miranda Porter



We spend half the time in masterclasses and the rest eating sumptuous multi-course meals (think smoked mackerel salad and yellow curry of suckling pork with snake beans), soaking in the hot tub, being pampered at the day spa, reading by the fire in our villas and pushing through comfort zones. I find myself chanting Kundalini yoga mantras, dawdling through a mindfulness walk along the retreat's forest-flanked boardwalk, tapping various parts of my body with my fingertips to relieve anxieties and attempting tribal dancing, all before lunchtime on a Wednesday.

My laptop waits in the two-bedroom villa. The phone's there, too. By the end of the first day I decide the emails I'd fretted about replying to could wait. I dive into the soft embrace of the king-sized bed. Tomorrow the toddler alarm and deadlines will be back. But for now, my priorities are wandering to the waterfall and having more coconut panna cotta. Self-indulgent? Too right. ♥

#### Five more fast-tracked retreats

1

QLD  
Daintree  
Ec lodge

Four nights in the Daintree Rainforest alone can work wonders for world-weary souls but add daily yoga, nourishing meals and a ceremonial waterhole swim and you'll barely recognise yourself ([hotel.qantas.com.au/daintreeecolodge](http://hotel.qantas.com.au/daintreeecolodge)). Test out the program at three new retreats to be held in 2022.

2

TAS  
Three Capes  
Lodge Wild  
Wellness  
Walk

Wild Wellness ([wildwellnessmethod.com](http://wildwellnessmethod.com)) is the brainchild of Tassie local Alice Hansen and offers short science-backed itineraries – some in partnership with Tasmanian Walking Company's Three Capes Lodge Walk. Set off in June 2022 for four days of nature therapy combined with journaling, breathwork and Wim Hof cold-water plunging.

3

NSW  
Crystalbrook  
Byron,  
Byron Bay

After a short retreat in July, Crystalbrook Byron ([hotel.qantas.com.au/crystalbrookbyron](http://hotel.qantas.com.au/crystalbrookbyron)) realised guests appreciated being able to fit a restorative getaway into their busy schedules (and drinking wine). Its Relax and Retreat package offers three nights of recalibration with yoga, a chakra healing massage, gut-health consultation and more.

4

QLD  
Eden Health  
Retreat,  
Currumbin  
Valley

Part of a multi-million-dollar refresh, 12 new premium villas have taken Eden Health Retreat (above; [edenhealthretreat.com.au](http://edenhealthretreat.com.au)) to the next level. Catering for shorter stays, Eden now offers three-night options every week. Expect nutrient-rich meals, deep relaxation and activities from water fitness to sound healing.

5

TAS  
Pumphouse  
Point,  
Lake St Clair

With massages now on the menu and a new yoga space installed, Pumphouse Point on Lake St Clair ([hotel.qantas.com.au/pumphousepoint](http://hotel.qantas.com.au/pumphousepoint)) hosted its first wellness retreat in September, offering morning yoga, healthy meals and mentoring sessions over four days. The next retreat will be in February, coinciding with the delivery of a sauna.



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